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LIFE begins not at birth, but at the moment of conception. Christianity was growing in the womb of history through all the *THE EMBRYONIC* centuries from history's beginning. We are told *STAGE* today that the study of life in its pre-natal existence, during the embryonic stage, is as important as during the period which follows birth.

Did Christianity have a father? (We are speaking now of Christianity, not of Christ.) Yes—the Spirit of God. And the mother of Christianity? She who carried the gradually increasing burden until, with all the pains of parturition, birth was given? The soul of humanity, itself created for this greatest of all services. There was a deal of Christianity in the world before Christ came. For centuries events had been transpiring, thought had been growing, God had been making himself known. The climax of these events of world history, the culmination of this world thought, the consummation of the divine self-manifestation—in these Christianity had birth.

But what before the birth? Three principal elements, strongly and wonderfully combined, made up this pre-natal Christianity. The latest of these elements to appear *THE PRINCIPAL* was the Roman. It was this element which con- *ELEMENTS* tributed the outer form and organization. A more potent element was the Greek, which marks the transition from

the embryonic to the fetal stage. With the introduction of the Greek intellectual force there comes a movement and an activity which had not been known before. But, after all, the most potent element was the Hebrew, since this constituted not only the germ but the very essence of the life which was later to be born.

The figure may be crude and rough, and must not be pressed too far or too closely ; but, inadequate as it is, we may be helped by its use to grasp a thought to which some of us, perhaps, have not definitely turned our minds — that Christianity, as it appeared in the teachings of Christ and the apostles, was the resultant of forces which had been in operation fifty centuries ; the outgrowth of many closely interwoven influences ; the highest stage in a development of life and thought toward which all the centuries of history had pointed, combining all Hebrew religious thought, Greek philosophic thought, and Roman organization.

The Hebrew element was in itself a growth, in which three stages may easily be distinguished. The last of these was Judaism, produced in the furnace of Babylonian captivity ; with its Ezra and Nehemiah, its Judas and Jonathan and Simon Maccabee ; with its ecclesiastical hierarchy and its complicated ritualism ; with its brilliant but exclusive patriotism, its stubborn loyalty ; with its scribes, its high priests, and synagogues ; with its washings and purifications, its sabbaths and fasts and days of atonement ; with its peculiar emphasis upon the holiness of God and the deep spiritual comprehension of true religious feeling ; with its legalism and its wisdom.

But Judaism was a daughter, the clearly marked descendant of that sublime movement in thought and life which, beginning with the deliverance from one exile and captivity — that of Egypt, continued through a thousand years of war and conflict, a thousand years of internecine strife,

a thousand years of divine favor and rebuke, a thousand years of prophets and psalmists, a thousand years of diplomatic dealings with Egypt and Assyria, and of contact with the world on every side; and closed, as it had begun, with another exile and captivity, darker and more galling for its leaders than that of Egypt—the seventy years of heartache and despair, of God-abandonment in the Babylonian captivity. This was the period of Israel, of kings and prophets, of wonders and miracles.

Israel was the mother of Judaism, but Judaism was likewise a grandchild; and in her case, as often happens, there reappeared many of the peculiar traits of the *THE SEMITIC* grandparent. For back in the most ancient times we see roaming to and fro on the great desert parallelogram of Arabia the tribes from which later Israel sprang. The barbarous horde, consisting of those whom in after-times we know as Arameans, Edomites, Moabites, and others, has drifted away from the old motherland Arabia, where life was so monotonous and existence so difficult, bringing with them “a curious passion of mixed resignation and hot anger,” the habit of detaching soul from body, which is cultivated by the long fasts and severe life of such a climate. They have a country religion, as yet uninfluenced by contact with the great civilization of Egypt and Babylonia, with a god who, though strikingly personal, means to them one irresistible force and power. With this idea taking concrete form in a particular god for each separate tribe, and intensified, but not modified, by the rigid and monotonous desert life; with nature suggesting “no bright and varied life, but only the august and uniform omnipotence that kills as well as vivifies;” with a religious life which, in this environment, finds expression in fanaticism and wild enthusiasm, of which self-mutilation and child-sacrifice are a witness; with an invincible idealism which pervades and controls all else; with no ritual or priestly system; with no ethical standards—for at this time might, not right, is the highest idea; with all this, these primitive barbaric tribes move west from Mesopotamia, take possession of Palestine, wandering from place to place, until, as time

passes on, one after another settles down to agricultural life. This life, and this beginning of thought, which we may call Semitic, in a narrow sense, was the source of Israelitish life and thought, which in turn was the source of Judaism, and this, combined with Greek and Roman influences, was the source of Christianity.

But now, as we observe the mother and the daughter, and the daughter's daughter, one following closely upon the other, we discover three distinct elements, closely interwoven, which, working together, seem to explain this most striking evolution. These three factors consist of three guilds, or schools, of thinkers and workers. Each guild has its roots in the oldest times, each has its period of special growth, each its day of highest exaltation and its day of death.

There was the guild of prophets, some of whom were mere soothsayers, who resort to the ministrations of music in order to arouse themselves into ecstatic frenzy; some, *THE PROPHET* dreaming seers, as much awake when sleep settled down upon their eyes as they were asleep, to all that was about them, in their waking moments; some, priests whom the prophetic spirit had aroused, but had not wholly subjugated; some, the greatest souls the world ever knew, whose hearts were touched by the spirit of the living God, whose eyes were open to visions of divine glory, whose arms were steeled by a courage born of close communion with higher powers.

There was the guild of priests, some of whom groveled about in the mire of covetousness and pollution, encouraging men to sin, that they, the priests, might have the sin-offering; some, perfunctory officials, with whom the letter of service was all-sufficient; some, true mediators between man and God, and teachers of the holiest and divinest truths; some of them, in their ministrations of divine things, reaching so near to God himself as to exhibit, in their lives and thoughts, the very essence of divinity.

There was the guild of sages, some of whom were wise in things that related to birds and beasts and herbs and trees ;

THE SAGE some of whom stood at the city gate, reaching out the hand to brother man with words of kindly wisdom as to conduct and duty, of parent toward child, of child toward parent, of husband and wife, of officer and prince ; some of them teaching in plain and simple speech the constitution of the universe, the laws of the great God, a knowledge of which was the beginning of wisdom ; some of them making heroic and successful effort to grapple with the problems which enter into the ever-changing, but never-ending, tragedies of life, the ministry of suffering and its function, the strength of sexual love and its dangers, the vanity of intellectual skepticism and its end.

The prophet was the idealist, the priest the ritualist, the sage the humanist. The prophet's thought centered upon the nation,

THE THREE the priest's upon the church, the sage's upon the world ; each of the three represented great currents of thought. To understand Christianity, one must know prenatal Christianity ; and to have this knowledge, it is necessary to take up each of the three elements in turn, and to ask, What did it contribute to Christianity ? For what is Christianity its debtor ?